

This owl may not have been habitually a silent owl, though the President says that it came quietly and went without noise. There are misconceptions concerning the silence of owls, as there are concerning the silence of Coolidge.

Was it a long-eared owl? There is not in this world a living thing whose vocal cords are used with greater effectiveness on those rare occasions when they are used at all. The fortunate ones among men who have lived for long periods deep in the woods may recall a startled awakening from a dream of dogs flying through the air, their barks rising to not unmusical crescendo—awakening to find a flock of long-eared owls circling about the shack.

The President's owl may have been a barred owl. If so, he was honored by a bird whose deep-toned, questioning voice is among the most impressive of big-woods sounds. There is no more striking melody in nature than that which carries far through the woods when two males of this species meet and sing a duet, the bass hooting just half as often as the tenor and both displaying considerable range. A few men have heard, too, their musical but mirthless laughter.

Could it have been—the utter solitude of the south grounds suggests it—that tiger among birds, the great horned owl, whose deep, far-carrying Whoo-hoo-hoo-hoo surpasses in volume the voice of any other bird, whose rarely uttered, piercing scream is the most blood-curdling sound of the night and the depths of the woods?

Or was it a screech owl, little lover of

nearness to the dwellings of men, frequenter of old apple orchards, the castanet-like snapping of whose bill has frightened many boys and men not a few—whose tremulous and warbling whistle, weird and melancholy, has sent shivers down so many spines? Or a barn owl, that bird of the monkey face, so furtive even in abundance that it is rarely seen, whose only note is a strange, startled scream? Or a saw-whet owl, whose voice is the rasping of rusty saw-teeth?

If there is significance in the perching of an owl on the President's bedpost, the measure of the significance is in the kind of owl it was. But there is no means of knowing, and every man superstitiously inclined will attach to the incident the significance that would go with the kind of owl which, in his opinion, accords most nearly with the Coolidge character.

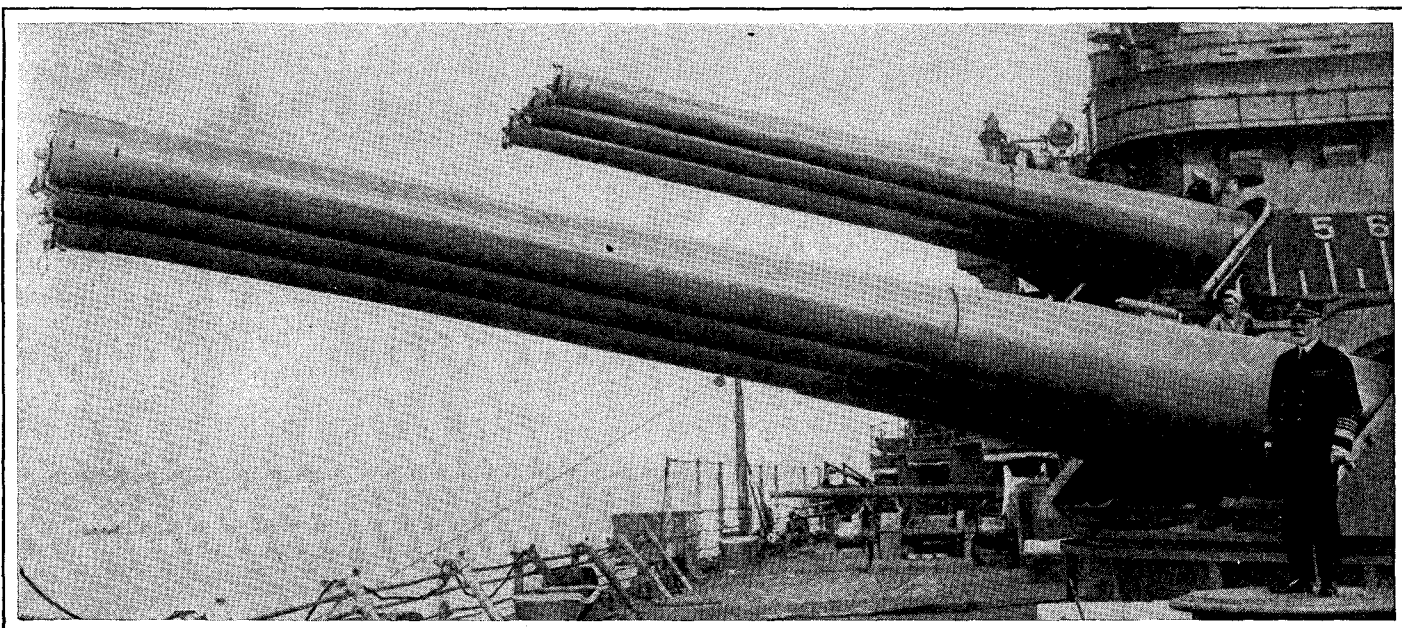
Any or all of the species might come out of the loneliness of the south grounds.

Gun for Gun and Man for Man

SOMETIMES we wonder whether, in the discussion of naval armament, too much emphasis is not being laid upon guns and tonnage. The 5-5-3 ratio governing the battleship power of Great Britain, the United States, and Japan was arrived at by purely mechanical methods. What would the ratio show if the imponderables of character, training, seamanship, and understanding of strategy could be taken into account? No man knows!

Time and again in naval history victory has deserted the heaviest artillery. With material power equal, victory has invariably gone to the fleet whose commanding officer exercised the highest degree of skill and manifested the greatest understanding of the purpose of naval combat. If this was true in the time of Nelson, it is a thousand times as true to-day. In Nelson's time the ship of the line was a comparatively simple engine of war. The truck guns which peered from the ports of the Victory were utterly simple in construction and control. Their range was short, their arc of fire limited, and their offensive power, as opposed to the defensive bulwarks confronting them, less than the power of modern artillery.

In the days of the Great Commanders the battleship generally moved towards its foe under shortened canvas at a rate of five or six miles an hour. To-day the situation is changed. Battleships approach each other at a speed of twenty or thirty miles an hour. Their captains must exercise command over huge floating fortresses of a complexity beyond the power of a layman to grasp. A single salvo from the guns of a modern battleship may put its opponent completely out of action while the opponent still lurks on the horizon. The ability to make instantaneous decisions and the ability to correlate the control of complex forces that is demanded of the modern naval commander makes the task of a Nelson, a Suffren, and a de Ruyter seem almost like child's play. Principles of naval combat remain the same; the



International

Guns of the Flagship Florida

application of them demands a speed of thought and action which would have tried the nerves of even the greatest commanders of the past.

Congress and the American people ought not to rest too securely in the comfortable delusion that our battle fleet is equal in material power to that of any fleet in the world until they determine

whether or not a personnel is being developed able to handle our vessels under war conditions. If we must pay for a fleet, let us give the commanders of that fleet the opportunity to develop their professional capacity to the uttermost.

Under modern conditions, Farraguts are quite as necessary as fifteen-inch guns.

Common Sense

By LAWRENCE F. ABBOTT

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THE other day I picked up on the desk of a colleague a book¹ with what the modern novelist would call the "intriguing" title of "Common Sense." It is an English book recently republished in this country. Its author is a university man, lately Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, and now, I believe, a chemist in the Anglo-Indian Civil Service. I take it to be a book on psychology, since it has an introduction by a Fellow of the Royal Society who is an expert in industrial psychology. The book, however, is singularly free from the metaphysical involutions of many modern psychological treatises. It appears to be, as nearly as I can make out, a discussion of the comparative advantages for a man of affairs of intuition based on actual experience and abstract reasoning based on an elaborate text-book education. The author seems to vote for intuition, although his conclusions are not very definite.

Common sense, I suppose, is one of the most difficult faculties or processes of the human mind to define, although we all instantly recognize it when we see it in operation. Many philosophers have tried to define it, but not with unqualified success. The English biologist and Catholic philosopher, St. George Mivart, says that it is "the power of judging philosophically, but without philosophical consciousness." The American philosopher, Emerson, calls it the just average of the faculties of the mind based on wide experience. "What tedious training," he says, "day after day, year after year, never ending, to form the common sense; what continual reproduction of annoyances, inconveniences, dilemmas; what rejoicing over us of little

men; what disputing of prices, what reckonings of interest!"

The entertaining quality of Dr. Hankin's book lies not in its abstract reasoning—for it has little of that psychological ingredient—but in the great array of anecdotes and incidents which he has collected to show the foolishness of a good deal of abstract reasoning even when it is based on the most advanced and comprehensive scheme of theoretical education. For example, he tells an amusing story of Charles Babbage. Babbage was an English mathematician and philosopher of the last century who attained a good deal of distinction in his day in various branches of science. He was a graduate of Cambridge University, wrote books on higher mathematics, was a founder of the Astronomical Society of Great Britain, was honored by membership in many learned bodies, and wrote a brilliant book on industrial economics which was translated into many foreign languages. How much this great cultivation of the brain helped his common sense is illustrated by the story, which I quote as follows:

Tennyson once wrote a poem called "The Vision of Sin," in which occur the lines:

'Every moment dies a man,
Every moment one is born.'

When this poem was published it came into the hands of the mathematician Babbage, the well-known inventor of a calculating machine of great scientific interest rather than of practical use. He thereupon wrote to the poet as follows:

"In your otherwise beautiful poem, there is a verse which reads—

'Every moment dies a man,
Every moment one is born.'

"It must be manifest that were this true, the population of the world would be at a standstill. In truth the rate of birth is slightly in excess of that of death.

"I would suggest that in the next edition of your poem you have it read:

'Every moment dies a man,
Every moment 1 1/16 is born.'

"Strictly speaking this is not correct. The actual figure is a decimal so long that I cannot get it in the line, but I believe 1 1/16 will be sufficiently accurate for poetry. I am, etc."

If there is any anecdote in literature which more delightfully illustrates the inconsequential and uncommonsensical operation of the ultra-mathematical mind, I have not run across it. It is on a par with the notion that Congress, even with the aid of scientific experts, can define the mathematical power of an intoxicant. But let us hastily pass that allusion by. I did not mean in this article to become involved in the discussion of the prohibition question.

It may be that Dr. Hankin's thesis is correct—that abstract reasoning is not as efficient in practical life as intuition based on experience—but failures in common sense are not confined to scientists. Artists are sometimes bamboozled for the lack of it, as is indicated by the following anecdote from Dr. Hankin's book:

Arthur Roberts, the comedian, once finished a cab drive, somewhere near Piccadilly Circus. As he got out he asked the cabman where he had better go to amuse himself. "Well, sir," said the cabby, "if you want a thoroughly good show and a real good time, you go and see Arthur Roberts at the Pav [London Pavilion, a well-known vaudeville theater] just over the way there." Owing to this unexpected compliment, Arthur Roberts gave a far more liberal tip than he otherwise would have done. The cabman was profuse in his thanks but, when driving away, he looked back and called out, in an altered voice, "Good-night, Arthur!"

Abstract reasoning as to the sincerity of a compliment lost a tip, and common-sense judgment as to the power of delicate flattery gained a tip.

Two American stories occur to me in illustration of the fact that temporary aberration of common sense may sometimes occur in the most highly trained minds. The late Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar was one of the ablest judges that ever sat upon the bench of the United States Supreme Court. He was an accomplished lawyer, served with distinction in the Confederate Army, was a Professor of Ethics and Metaphysics in the University of Mississippi, represented

¹ Common Sense and Its Cultivation. By Dr. Hanbury Hankin, M.A. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York.